

The Return of Elijah
to Our Earth



By
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W. Baldwin

The Return of Elijah to Our Earth.

It is written in Malachi, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

This could not have had its *complete* fulfillment in John the Baptist, for he was to go before our Lord in the *spirit* and *power* of Elias.

John the Baptist was *an* Elijah in spirit, (Luke i. 16, 17,) but not *the literal* Elijah; whence, when asked, "Art thou Elias?" (John i. 21) he answered, "I am not. Art thou that prophet? No." This implies that John, though knowing from the angel's announcement to his father that he was referred to by Malachi iv. 5 (Luke i. 17), whence he wore the costume of Elijah, yet knew by inspiration that he did not exhaustively fulfill *all* that is included in this prophecy: that there is *a further fulfillment*.

Even after the transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 11) Jesus speaks of Elijah's coming "to restore all things" as still future, though He adds that "Elijah (in the person of John the Baptist) is come already *in a sense*" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary). There is a still further comment to the effect that the coming of Christ, being *gracious* in its character, could not well be designated a day "dreadful."

If he should *not* come in person, then the meaning may be: there will be raised up a series of eminent servants of

the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to prepare the way for His second coming.

But *why* should he not come again in *person*? It is not a thing incredible; on the contrary, it is not only desirable and a pleasing thought, but it seems most *fitting*.

Before the destruction of the antediluvian world, Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, gave due warning of the impending judgment. The significance of the long period in which the Ark was being built, was that of repeated calls, or one continuous call, to *repentance*, that by giving heed thereto, the disaster, from which the Ark was intended to deliver, might be averted. It was a sign both of the long suffering of Jehovah and of inevitable destruction in case the necessity of the Flood were not removed by reformation.

So, also, while sin is rebuked and judgments pronounced, it was not the *condemnation* of the world, but its *salvation*, that was immediately contemplated by the Advent of the Son of God: "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." Its condemnation was reserved for the *second* coming.

Having come to save His people from their sins, to seek and to save that which was lost, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and having gone to appear in the presence of the Father for purposes of intercession and regnancy, the *centuries* between His first and second coming are, therefore, centuries in which it was *intended* offers of mercy be incessantly made to the sinful generations of mankind.

This great length of time, in the wisdom and forbearance of God, was necessary for the unfolding of His gracious plans. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation," has been sounded aloud through these ages; repeated over and over again in the proclamations of the heralds of

salvation. Time and again, to recover the people of God from apostasies, and urge on the church to greater consecration and service, have men of unusual ability, fervor and devotion, and extraordinary learning and force of character, *appeared*.

Yet, at the dawn of the Restorative epoch, much will remain or be found *undone*. Whilst the work might have proceeded more rapidly, and more of the Spirit's power been employed and displayed, such manifestly was not the purpose of God. The gospel will still have its enemies, and they will have become exceedingly bitter. The spirit of irreligion and anti-Christ will be alive and intensely active. "Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." . . . "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

Now, as there was *occasion* for Elijah to come in person, in a private or secret way, in anticipation of the approaching death of our Lord, may there not also be need of his *again* coming in anticipation of the end of the world? then in an open and public manner, for the fulfillment of prophecy and the accomplishment of extensive and necessary results?

Under just such conditions as are thus declared to exist, conditions demanding greater displays of divine grace, different methods of procedure, and a human leader of additional experience and efficiency—a visitor from Heaven itself—may not Elijah *reappear*?

At the beginning of the Gospel dispensation John the Baptist did a great *preparatory* work; may there not be a great work, on a larger scale and of a wider scope, *awaiting* the Prophet Elijah, who was in conference with the Saviour on the Mount of Transfiguration in regard to that great event, so near at hand, which would terminate the dispen-

sation of the Law? Present in the interest of Him who was about to be slain as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and of those whose salvation was dependent upon the sacrificial death of the cross, and at a time when a *new order* of things was to take the place of the *old*, how *natural* that he should be on the earth again at and for the final "restitution of all things"!

During this long period—the many centuries which have elapsed since the beginning of the Christian dispensation—much thought has been given to the *contents* of Scripture: books of a religious character have been written, sermons preached, and various systems of theology and works of apologetics produced.

The strong characters have been those who have investigated for themselves the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Their convictions have been deep-seated, their beliefs sacred, their views courageously defended and advocated.

If the war of the religious sects has been stubborn and painful, compensation is seen in the defenses of Christianity and the development of the sterling and heroic in the defenders of the faith.

Whatever evils may have attended these earnest contests in the past, the necessity for independent investigation of and contention for the truth seems to have been made the condition of the church's growth and development—its safety as well as power and progress.

Perhaps, in the providence of God, the time has come when this doctrinal controversy *within* the church has reached that stage beyond which it is not desirable or well for it to go, or can not go without, on the one hand, interfering with the church's claim for Unity, and, on the other, impairing by its divisions the force of its appeals to the world

for the acceptance of a religion designed and destined to be Universal.

In other words: the *internal* controversy that once was in order and in place, is now out of order and out of place; that once was a good, is now an evil; that once served a good and intended purpose, is now no longer needed for that purpose; that once was constructive and preservative, is now destructive. The time has come for the church to unload or drop its accumulative mass of erroneous conceptions and expositions of the Word of God and the Way of Life or Salvation, *whatever thereof it is still carrying*, and face the work of the future with a clear and distinct line drawn between the true and the false as commingled and embodied in and permeating the various sects.

Perhaps it may not have been intended that certain matters in controversy should ever be settled by those immediately concerned or engaged therein, or by those thereafter affected. Human nature being only partially sanctified in this life, it would be more than could be expected, and might in itself be impossible. Yet it would seem that the chief ends to be subserved by these controversies being attained, these unsettled matters, if allowed to continue longer, might have mischievous results and hinder the future work and well-being of the church—might affect those conditions connected with, involved in and constituting its Millennial Glory.

It is hardly to be supposed that any further contributions to theological or creedal literature will make any *stronger* the differentiated positions of the professedly orthodox, while it is more than probable that the ranks of the opposition will hereafter increase, as it is to be greatly feared, that, by reason of the present decline of interest in theological subjects or pretended weariness of them, the department itself will be greatly neglected, and with it,

also, the cultivation of spirituality, especially as the present is also a time of intemperate zeal for wealth and pleasure. Consequent upon this decline of interest in the old dogmas of the church, *new* systems of strange and curious and, in many respects, absurd interpretations of Scripture may arise, and have already arisen, to attract and capture the disaffected and inexperienced.

Now, great and rich as are these theological and creedal productions and collections in the possession of Christendom, it **MUST BE CONFESSED** that the church is facing the golden age of its prosperity and entering upon the Era of Missions greatly **HANDICAPPED** by the unadjusted differences of the sects, although these differences, unfortunate and deplorable and at the same time natural and to be expected, in many things are not incompatible with the possession and evidences of personal piety and salvation.

Thus the various evangelical denominations, by a conspicuous and mortifying failure to agree in certain matters of great, though not essential, importance, find themselves under restraint in their co-operative movements, the marks of difference raising bewildering questions in the minds of the heathen and prejudicing the cause itself. *It is certainly unscientific and unbusiness-like to conduct the world to Christ through these respective avenues of disagreement*

All polemical systems of theology should be reduced to some kind of unity, that the one gospel of the Son of God, which should have but one common interpretation for the acceptance and conversion of the world, *may be free in its presentation from all injurious and mischievous concomitants.*

What seems needed, or at least desirable, is, that just such a one as Elijah of olden time come down from Heaven to point out or help eradicate what is not of God, but of man; what has no rightful place in Christian doctrine and Ecclesiastical government; what, in the providence of God

and apparently for wise reasons, has been permitted and tolerated thus far among the evangelical branches of the church, but may in the future, if suffered to remain, frustrate the purposes of God and defeat the ultimate end in view—that the writings of theologians and the views of thinking men may come under the inspection, for approval or disapproval, of an authority so excellent, competent and trustworthy.

What great *rejoicing* there would be throughout the Household of Faith, if, for instance, the question, so much and so long in controversy, were settled: Whether the forgiveness of sins, which comes from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, is based upon the satisfaction of divine justice, or not; whether or not it was necessary that, before sin could be pardoned, the Eternal Son of God should suffer in His own person the penalty of our transgressions—the penalty of God's broken laws; whether Christ did or did not take the law-place of the sinner; whether His atonement is vicarious or not?

So, also, in regard to all the other questions which divide and disturb the Household of Faith, the utmost care often being required, even in considering ordinary matters of religion, lest needless offense be given or taken.

The inquiry might arise in this connection, Whether all denominations would be merged in one, or retain their separate or individual organizations?

Should the latter be the case, on grounds, perhaps, of language, locality, distance, convenience, expediency, liberty, preference or indifference, doubtless all barriers in the way of the communion of saints would be removed, and there would be such modifications as to *name* that nothing associated with it would be out of keeping with the prevailing unity of Christian doctrine. Under one or more forms of government the churches must of necessity exist: they must

be marshalled for "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Rev. xvi. 14).

And it might also be here added that substantial unity in doctrine and consistent forms of government having been secured, and there being no internal controversies or contentions over the old matters in dispute, most favorable conditions would exist for still *deeper* investigations of the truths of Scripture, for *further* acquisitions of religious knowledge, for still *greater* and *stronger* defenses of Christianity, for the *developing* and *perfecting* of the authorized system of theology.

The mind of the church being occupied with and concentrated upon the great "mystery of godliness" as never before, there will be fulfilled the words of prophecy: "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"; also, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name" (Malachi iii. 16).

Having approved of the system of doctrine that is in closest agreement with the facts of Scripture, or so reconstructed these systems that they are in conformity with them and in harmony with each other, *i. e.*, restored them to unity, Elijah will attack, and with more than his old-time readiness, courage and efficiency, the worldliness of the churches, the desecration of the Sabbath Day and the crying evils of the times.

He will also rescue the weak and unstable from the baneful influence and teachings of seducing spirits—"the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle" (Rev. xvi. 14). Never having been *established* in the faith, and having become *skeptical* in their views of the

relations between God and men, and of the principles of salvation or the doctrines of grace, they are in no condition to *withstand* the evils that have come upon the earth. They are but “children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

Not only are the weak and the tempted to be encouraged and strengthened, and those fallen prey to deceivers rescued, such also of the elect as have not *yet* been brought to faith and repentance, are to be *sought out* and *looked after*, the end not to be or come until the *last one* of those written in “the Lamb’s book of life” is rescued and recovered from the Fall.

While thus heresies are being rebuked and extirpated, and soundness of doctrine and peace and order restored to the churches, and the elect in great numbers gathered in, the conditions will be favorable for the prevailing and persistent *false religions* of heathendom to receive the attention to be devoted to them—the religions of those countries that have declined to accept the truth as it is in Jesus.

Who knows but what many of the judgments that shall befall the world in the last days, may not be *through the word* of this divinely appointed Ambassador from Heaven, to bring back to remembrance that there is still a God in Israel, and as a preventive to some, and to others a foretaste, of the judgments of the last great Day? Elijah withheld *rain* in Ahab’s time. He was a marked character then; he will be *still more so* when he comes again.

And to *those* occupying high positions of trust and authority among the nations, Christian as well as pagan, who like Ahab have been putting barriers in the way of the progress of the true religion and furthering the interests of anti-Christ, he will also *address* himself. The *statement*, that Satan deceives nations, is full of *suggestive thought*.

Conditions in the church being thus greatly improved and wickedness everywhere diminished, nations will settle their grievances amicably, and *the reign* of righteousness and peace will at last be *realized*.

But, it may be asked, Would men *accept* him as the Elijah of old? How would they know that he was not an impostor?

His coming would, no doubt, be so conducted as to be substantiated by the testimony of competent witnesses. As he was taken up to Heaven in a chariot of fire, he may return in like manner. There would be such popular credence given to it, and it would have such historic verity, that it would be everywhere accepted as true.

As to the *length* of his visit on the earth there are, of course, no means of determining. It might be a period of seven years or seventy years or a thousand years. It might mark the introduction of the millennial period, or be a most important part of it, and he might remain unto the end. Should he return to Heaven during any part of the Millennium, this need not necessarily prevent a third visit or a series of visits before the end of the world. He may then bring with him "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads; or in their hands; and who are to live and reign with Christ a thousand years." . . . "This is the first resurrection."

The principles of Christianity being in the ascendancy, these martyrs will be recognized and welcomed as glorified saints back to earth again, to rejoice together over the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the great defeat of the Evil One, Christ still ruling from His throne on high, but in an especial sense seated in their hearts, *they exercising a kingly influence on the earth*, being in closest touch with all the inter-

ests of the Kingdom, the sign and pledge of the greater glories yet to come, themselves *confirmed* in the purity of their characters.

But it must be *conceded* that the mere fact of the competency of the testimony that he came from the skies, would not in itself alone be sufficient to convince the church that he was the accredited Ambassador from the Court of Heaven and the Judge of controversies and Restorer of all things.

Recognizing the power of deep-seated religious convictions, customary observances and habitual practices, Elijah himself would be on trial as well as the religious sects. Pride of opinion, prejudice, education and a dislike to acknowledging being in the wrong, would directly or indirectly have great weight. Naturally, we would all have to be convinced of error first, and, as we are to try the spirits whether they are of God, rather than give in or yield to his judgment and authority, the question would have to be settled in this connection, Whether, as "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light," he who claims to be Elijah may not himself be Satan or his emissary?

It is to be very much doubted, in fact it is not to be believed, that the simple fact of a visitation from the skies by Elijah himself—such a supernatural phenomenon—would have any weight whatever in changing the minds of believers in their views of truth and duty *even where there was error*.

Men do have the courage of their convictions, and their beliefs are most sacred in matters of religion. The greater the opposition, the greater often the tenacity with which they are held. Even *miraculous power*, employed in connection with his work of restoration, would not *cause* the Presbyterian denomination to abandon its Calvinistic points, nor the Methodist its view of regeneration and free will, nor the Unitarian its denial of the divinity of Christ and the atoning

merits of His sacrificial death, nor the Universalist its belief in the ultimate salvation of all mankind, nor would it cause the Baptist to give up immersion, nor the Church of Rome the headship and infallibility of the Pope and transubstantiation, confession, purgatory and prayers for the dead.

Christ Himself came unto His own, and His own received Him not; and He said, though one rose from the dead they would not be persuaded. Men face death itself on battlefields, and retire unchanged from the fiercest and hottest discussions only to *renew* them again with the same results, such being the persistency and obstinacy of the human will.

So it would be in our attitude towards Elijah considered simply as a Supernatural or Celestial Phenomenon, and nothing more, among us — *and we would be right in so doing*. But when he comes he will be more than an arrival from the skies. He will be an instrument of Jehovah, filled with the Holy Spirit; and, in connection with his mission or work of restoration, the Spirit will move upon the hearts of God's people throughout the world, and with more than wonted power. And so the true people of God will be convinced by *the testimony* of the Holy Spirit in *addition*, and they will receive grace to act accordingly. There will be a *way* whereby, in the course of time, the promised restoration will be effected, or the indispensable prerequisites to its accomplishment secured.

Then the watchmen on the towers of Zion will "see eye to eye" as the Lord brings again Zion, and the church, a united body, will advance for missionary achievement "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners," the time *arrived* for the fulfillment of the Intercessory prayer of her great Head, "that they all may be one, . . . that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

Some may be inclined to say, It is not at all likely Elijah's return to our earth will take place in *our* day. But why should it be regarded as improbable? The period of the restoration being an assured fact and the last and closing one of God's earthly kingdom, it must have a beginning as well as an end, and existing conditions are certainly *ominous*.

As many prophets and righteous men of old desired to see the coming of Christ, and before His coming there were those who were watching and waiting, so there is among men to-day a fear of approaching evils and an expectation of some special and extraordinary help from Heaven.

In the *slight* put upon creeds and the prevailing *dislike* of doctrinal teaching and preaching, sin has come to be *less* sinful, salvation *less* redemptive, atoning blood *less* precious and needful, and the grip of the churches not only seems, but is correspondingly, *less* strong, while among the nations there is an unusual amount of "distress with perplexity" The great battle between Capital and Labor is apparently not far off, and so in both church and state there is trouble ahead, and urgent need of *some one soon* to straighten things out, to set things right, to turn away the threatened "curse."

It is true the Spirit of God alone is adequate in all such matters, but God has His appointed agents and instrumentalities through whom He works, and the last of the Old Testament writers, as a parting benediction, held out a *hope*, held up a *sign of relief*, to be realized in the distant ages, when conditions would become so serious so menacing, so intolerable as to call for overwhelming judgment: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

Happy, indeed, would we be, were our eyes to behold among us the Forerunner of our Blessed Lord!

In the *meantime* let us by all means hold on to our religious beliefs so far as we are convinced they are founded upon the Word of God, whether others think so or not, and let them also do the same, hoping the day may not be far distant when he, who once spake for God, will, as the representative on earth of all the prophets and apostles, interpret aright where human judgment has gone astray or has failed to see the truth—man's judgment, alas! being so often and so much affected by remaining depravity and unbelief, whereby the best are blinded at times and easily self-deceived. According to varying degrees of pride of intellect and self-righteousness, secondary or tertiary forms of truth somehow come to be preferred to the primary, or false forms themselves are resorted to in order to get away from the truth in its purity and absolute claims.

But it must not be said that the valuable and precious products of the profound thought and labors of the fathers were lightly esteemed, ignored, compromised and sacrificed by the children of a superficial and less heroic age; *and let not such think* attempts at external unity, for the more effectual evangelization of the world, on a non-sectarian or practically creedless platform, could be anything else than a sad and deserved failure abroad and a serious damage at home. Under the name of a broad and accepted liberalism, theories, tenets and dogmas that are in fact really false, may be and are *allowed* the same privileges and standing as those really true, every one being free to take his choice and advocate his own, or *have none whatever*. But Christianity is "the doctrine of Christ," and most important and significant are the words: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." . . . "And be ready always to give an answer to

every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Catechisms and creeds and indoctrinating sermons are, therefore, as necessary now as ever, and even more so, to make the members of our churches intelligent, efficient, steadfast and witness-bearing.

Elijah's *return*, therefore, is clearly A FURTHER EXTENSION OF GOD'S MERCIFUL PURPOSE towards the children of men. For a thousand years—an indefinite period—the threatened curse is to be withheld, postponed; yea, moreover, mitigated, made less by the restorative efforts of this mighty agent in the hands of the Lord.

But, notwithstanding the better conditions brought about by the work of restoration and constituting the latter-day glory of the church, towards the end of the millennial period, during which Satan has been bound, *i. e.*, his work reduced to narrower limits and his influence less felt, there will be an *outbreak* of the evil forces pent up in the hearts of false professors of religion, the impenitent or gospel-hardened and the secret and open enemies of God's people. Satan being loosed again, his power and influence will be far reaching: "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison. And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them."

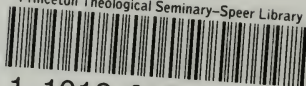
We can see how, having raised his voice in the interest of pure religion and righteous government, set forth the claims of Christianity upon the acceptance of the nations, given due and faithful notice of the expected return of our Lord for judgment, and having thus notably and measurably

“restored” things, Elijah has been *preparing* the way for many *to look in sorrow* upon Him whom they once pierced; how, the spirit of grace and supplication being outpoured, there will be *great mourning*, exactly as is predicted in the latter part of the twelfth chapter of Zechariah; and how a *nation might be born in a day*.

Also, how on the Day of Judgment the enemies and rejecters of Christianity *can find no fault whatever*, having witnessed the marvelous effects of the Gospel on the hearts and lives and in the experiences of believers, and having had invitations and warnings and appeals in an extraordinary manner *even up to the very last*.

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